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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the type of marking rule normally used in the production and interpretation of message forms for which semantic marking is possible. The structure and use of such rules is illustrated through a recent study of the semantics of personal address among the Balangingi' Samal, a Muslim group of the southern Philippines. The rule used as an example of marking rules in general is the "name-type" rule, or that used to select a type of name. This rule is described in terms of 7 outputs, 5 marking operators, and cues associated with marking operators. For a marking rule to be effective in communicating information, there must be some procedure for identifying the unmarked output each time the rule is applied, in both production and interpretation. Such procedures in the Samal address system carry context rather than content information. This distinction is important for understanding the structure and use of large-scale semantic systems. (AM)

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THE USE OF MARKING RULES IN SEMANTIC SYSTEMS*

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THE USE OF MARKING RULES IN SEMANTIC SYSTEMS

Introduction:

Systems of personal address have, for several years now, received increasing attention within the growing body of research on the semantics of natural languages. A good justification for such interest--if not one of the principal reasons behind it--is the fact that the production and interpretation of address forms almost invariably requires the use of a highly self-contained semantic system, including (though in a simpler and more manageable form) many of the most basic types of procedures utilized in far more complex areas of language. This is especially true, I would suggest, with respect to the phenomenon that has come to be called semantic marking.

To illustrate the general nature of marking as it applies to personal address, let me give a brief example from my own version of the English address system. I normally address my wife with her nickname, as in: "Judy, can you come here for a minute." The address form in this case is intended only to get her attention and, perhaps, to single her out if more than one person is present. If it succeeds in this regard, then the address form actually used (her nickname) is highly predictable, in no sense unusual, and in close conformity with her expectations. In other words, it is unmarked. In most situations, I could say, "Hey, can you come here for a minute," with precisely the same effect. In contrast to this, if I wanted to convey affection or intimacy, for example, I would probably say, "Honey, could you come here for a minute," using honey or some more idiosyncratic pet name to encode the intended information. The fact that a marked address form was used (marked in the sense that it differed from normal and unmarked usage) is sufficient to indicate that some item or items of information have been encoded. The fact that it was a pet name, rather than some other marked form, would allow her to decode "affection" or "intimacy" as the semantic content of the address form itself.

In this paper I would like to discuss in some detail the type of procedure, called a marking rule, that is normally employed in the production and interpretation of message forms for which semantic marking is possible. In order to give a complete illustration of the structure and use of such rules, I shall draw extensively from a recent study of the semantics of personal address among the Balangingi' Samal, a Muslim group of the southern Philippines.

The address system used by any competent adult speaker of this Samal dialect is normally capable of generating several hundred different address forms. These are divided into nine conceptually distinct types, one of which represents that class of address forms whose members contain a name as their only lexical constituent (as contrasted, for example, with address forms containing kin terms, honorifics, civil or religious titles, or some combination of these elements). Once it has been determined that a name alone would be the appropriate form to use in addressing a particular individual, a decision must be made as to which type of name to use. And, following this, additional routines are employed to choose the lexical item that appropriately represents the type of name just selected.

The particular rule that I want to introduce as an example of marking rules in general is the one used to select a type of name; henceforth referred to as the name-type rule. I should emphasize that the version presented here represents only a fragment of the address system used by one informant, although similar marking rules are used for the same purpose by all of the informants from whom complete address systems were elicited.

To describe a marking rule, we must specify three kinds of entities: a set of outputs, which represent the possible results of applying the rule; a set of marking operators, which perform the actual encoding of information; and a set of cues, representing the items of information that can be encoded by the rule. Each cue is associated with one marking operator, although several related cues may share the same one.

In the name-type rule there are seven distinct outputs, representing three types of personal names (that is, types of names that can by associated with a specific individual), and four types of pronames. Each type of personal name has associated with it one type of proname, which may be used as a substitute for the former under certain conditions.

First of all, there is a type of personal name that I will call a "true name" (TN), referring to what is commonly accepted as an individual's actual, given name (e.g., 'abdulmuluk). The associated type of proname is denoted TN'. The second type of personal name is glossed "nickname" (NN) and is usually derived from an individual's "true name" (e.g., muluk from 'abdulmuluk), although this is not necessarily the case. The associated proname type is denoted NN'. The third type of personal name will be glossed "pet name" (PN). It is often derived from a person's "nickname" (e.g., llu' from muluk), although there are many other sources for lexical items used as "pet names." The type of proname associated with this is denoted PN'. Finally, there is a special type of proname, denoted T, which for this informant does not correspond to any type of personal name. It is the most affect-laden of all name-types, and there are a number of restrictions underlying its use.

There are five marking operators used in this rule. These are also listed in the appendix along with a brief description of the information that they are used to encode. The first of these operators is associated with several cues that concern an attitude of "positive affect" toward Alter (as I shall refer to the addressee): a sort of generalized "liking", or a "warm" feeling toward him, "happiness" stemming from his presence or actions, and so forth. This operator is denoted +a. In contrast, the second operator (-a) encodes several cues that I shall lump together as "negative affect": a feeling of dislike, "unhappiness" with Alter, and so on. The third operator (x) encodes something a little stronger than this: cues having to do with anger and what is literally glossed as a "bad" or "upset" liver. The fourth operator (d)

encodes a cue that we can gloss as "deference", or a sort of mild "respect". The fifth operator (n) is used when Ego (as I shall call the informant in this case) is uncertain about the actual lexical item representing some type of personal name for Alter: for example, when he does not have a "pet name" for Alter or cannot think of one quickly enough. It is also used to emphasize social distance, and a general lack of familiarity with Alter as an individual.

With the basic material out of the way, we can turn to the actual operation of the name-type rule (shown in Figure 1). The process is initiated by selecting one of the rule's outputs to serve as a starting point for the encoding of information. This is what I will refer to as the unmarked output; it represents the usual or expected form of address, with regard to the context in which the rule is applied. In the name-type rule, only the three types of personal names (TN, NN, and PN) may be unmarked: that is, they are the only three outputs that this informant uses to begin the encoding process. Once the identity of the unmarked output has been determined (I will discuss how this is done later), if Ego does not wish to encode any of the available cues, then no marking will occur; the application of the rule can be terminated immediately; and the unmarked name-type will be the final output of the rule. On the other hand, if he wants to encode one of the available cues, then he applies its associated operator to the unmarked output in order to determine which of the other outputs encodes this particular item. Diagrammatically, this is indicated by the use of labeled arrows extending between pairs of outputs. For example, if the output "nickname" (NN) were unmarked, and if Ego wanted to encode "positive affect" for Alter, then the output "pet name" (PN) would be an appropriate encoding of this cue. Note that in Figure 1 there is an arrow labeled +a extending from NN to PN. We can state this verbally by saying that a "pet name" is marked by positive affect with respect to a "nickname." And, once again, the application of the rule could either be terminated, or it could continue with the encoding of further information, given that there remains some available operator.

Given this brief and admittedly, incomplete description of a marking rule, let me turn now to some observations on the use of marking rules in general, and the demands that such a rule makes on the structure and operation of the semantic system of which it would normally be a part. First of all, it should be emphasized that if a marking rule is involved in the production of a message form--whether or not it is actually used to encode information in a given instance--neither production nor interpretation of the message form can take place without prior knowledge of the unmarked output in effect during application of the rule. Suppose, for example, that Ego addresses Alter with the latter's "nickname". If Alter is unaware of the output that Ego originally took as unmarked, then in this case he would have no way of determining which of three conflicting interpretations was the correct one. To be precise, a "nickname" is marked by positive affect when a "true name" is unmarked; it is marked by negative affect when a "pet name" is unmarked; and it encodes nothing at all when the "nickname" itself represents the unmarked output. As soon as Alter thinks he knows which output was taken as unmarked, then he can interpret the message more or less unambiguously. But should he happen to disagree with Ego on the identity of the unmarked output, then misinterpretation would be the result.

In other words, for a marking rule to be effective at all in communicating information, there must be some procedure for identifying the unmarked output each time the rule is applied, in both production and interpretation; and this procedure must normally lead to agreement between Ego and Alter.

In the Samal address system such procedures do in fact exist; and in general they take the following form: Since by far the largest proportion of address usage is unmarked, even a short history of interaction between two individuals is sufficient for each of them to become aware of what the other regards as an unmarked form to be used in addressing him, independent of how such a form might be interpreted in

other contexts. When such a customary address form has become established, then the aspect of this form relevant to the marking rule in question is taken as unmarked (e.g., the name-type represented by the customary address form, when the name-type rule becomes relevant to production or interpretation). If no customary form has been developed (and both parties would normally be aware of this), then an additional information-processing routine is employed to decide which of the rule's outputs should be taken as unmarked. Such routines are highly shared among informants, and they utilize information of a sort normally available to both Ego and Alter, thereby allowing for agreement on the unmarked output to be used. For the name-type rule, this supporting routine is rather trivial, since a "nickname" is usually taken as unmarked when there is no customary form of address. For one of the other marking rules used in this address system, the unmarked output is selected on the basis of relative age and whether or not Alter happens to be a hajji'. This information is normally available to both parties: the identity of, or lack of, a customary address form, their relative age, and Alter's status as a hajji' (since he would normally wear the symbols of his pilgrimage in public).

Although items such as these are employed in the production process, and may actually be encoded in the final address form, they do not really represent part of the major intent of the communication. That is, they are not generally used by Ego to effect a change in Alter's current state of knowledge. Rather, they have the primary role of establishing a framework or context in which other, more immediately salient, items of information can be encoded or decoded. Consider the nature of the information used in the name-type rule. It includes such items as "liking" and "disliking" for Alter, "happiness" with him, "anger" towards him, "deference" and so forth. These are concerned with relatively private emotional and attitudinal states; and they would normally be encoded in an address form only when Ego explicitly wanted such

information to have an effect on Alter's current state of knowledge, his attitudes, and the behavior that might be expected to follow from such. When actually encoded, items of this type exemplify what I would prefer to call the semantic content of a message. I should emphasize, however, that by far the largest proportion of Samal address usage is completely unmarked, and hence devoid of semantic content in the sense that I am using the term here. For the relatively small proportion of cases in which content information is encoded in an address form, this is invariably done through the use of marking rules of one kind or another; and this is true of all versions of the Samal address system elicited during the course of this study.

I have found it extremely useful in connection with this study to maintain a strong distinction between content and context information, where the latter includes such items as relative age, customary address forms, sex, and so forth, used to establish a semantic context for the encoding or decoding of content items. These two types of information differ, not only in terms of communicative intent, but they play significantly different roles during the interpretive process. Alter must be aware of the unmarked name-type, for example, before he can determine whether or not Ego's usage is marked and, if so, by what information. Since context items are, among other things, used to determine which output of a rule is unmarked, then Alter must employ them in what is essentially a production routine, even though the overall process is one of interpretation. In other words, Alter takes the context information that he believes Ego to have used (as I mentioned, such items should be mutually available), and he uses it to generate an unmarked output--hopefully, the one that Ego originally employed. By comparing the unmarked name-type to the type of name that Ego addressed him with, he can determine whether or not this usage is marked; and, if it is, he can use his own rule to see which marking operators were applied, and thereby retrieve the content information that Ego encoded.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the distinction between content and context information is an extremely important one for our understanding of the structure and use of large-scale semantic systems, and that we shall find information-processing routines of the marking rule type particularly relevant in studying the process by which the semantic content of a message is encoded and decoded.

The Use of Marking Rules in Semantic Systems

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Balangingi' Samal Address System:

1. Name-type rule:

Outputs (name-types):

(Examples for pronames are the lexical items appropriate for use to an individual junior to Ego and within roughly the same generation)

TN: ('on-na to'od = "his true name") Personal name commonly recognized as an individual's actual, given name. E.g., 'abdulmuluk.

TN': Proname corresponding to "true name". E.g., lella ("male"), 'a'a ("person").

NN: (danglay-na = "his 'nickname'") Personal name, usually derived from an individual's "true name" (e.g., muluk from 'abdulmuluk). Frequently, the name by which he is referred to in the community at large.

NN': Proname corresponding to "nickname". E.g., dakayu' siali (lit. "one younger-sibling").

PN: ('ugay 'ugay-na = "his 'pet name'; or 'ugay'ugay-ku ma 'ia = "my 'pet name' for him") Personal name frequently derived from an individual's "nickname". E.g., llu' from muluk, or or kki' from hakim. "Pet names" are highly idiosyncratic, and may derive from a number of different sources other than "nicknames" (past events, physical characteristics [e.g., 'ombeng from sombeng, "hare-lip"], nonsense words, etc.)

PN': Proname corresponding to "pet name". E.g., 'oto' (for males), nde' (for females).

T: Special proname that does not correspond to any type of personal name. Can sometimes be an "honorific" used as a name: e.g., tuan (for males) and dayang (for females).

Only personal name-types (TN, NN, PN) have the potential of being unmarked during the application of the name-type rule. Pronames are always marked.

2. Marking operators and associated cues:

+a: (positive affect)

'alasa: "strong liking (not romantic)"
kinogan 'atay: "liver made happy" (happiness with Alter)

-a: (negative affect)

ngga'i 'alasa: "disliking"
'ala'at 'atay: "bad liver (toward Alter)"
'akuddu' 'atay: "disturbed/upset liver (toward Alter)"

x: (anger)

'ag'amā ma 'ia: "feeling anger toward him"

d: (deference)

maltabat: "deference", "mild respect"

n: (no simple gloss for this)

This operator is used when a personal name of some type is not known, and to encode information such as:

'insa' 'ia kinata'uhan: "he is not [very well] known [to me]". When Ego does not know very much about Alter, his background, kinsmen, etc. When Ego wants to communicate social distance.

Name-type Rule

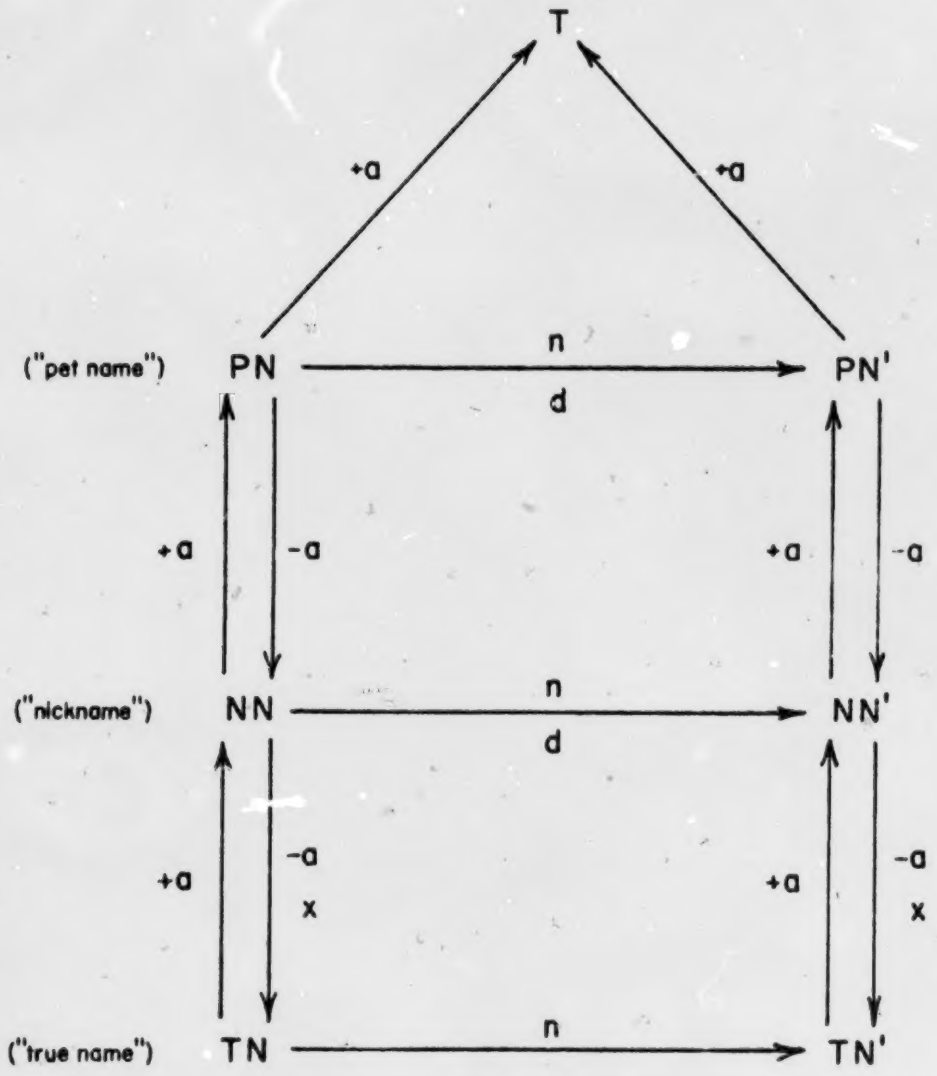

Figure 1

26